

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Perinatal Complications as Predictors of Autism

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The reported diagnosis of autism has increased in the past two decades. The term autism does not refer to a specific diagnosis. Most research on autism involves individuals with one or more of the following diagnoses: autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, or pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). The majority of research concerning this population has focused on etiology. Findings from this research suggest that both genetic and environmental factors play a major role. Despite numerous studies finding a link between perinatal complications and autism, a firm conclusion cannot be drawn due to the variation in methodology. The present study further investigated the relationship between perinatal complications and autism. Perinatal data were collected using the Maternal Perinatal Scale (MPS), a standardized measure with evidenced validity and reliability. There were three subject groups. The first group consisted of individuals previously diagnosed with autistic disorder. The second group consisted of individuals previously diagnosed with Asperger's disorder. The third group was the control group, and it consisted of individuals with no history of neurologic or psychological diagnoses. Results of an ANOVA indicated individuals with autistic disorder had a significantly higher number of reported perinatal complications when compared to

individuals in the control group. Those diagnosed with Asperger's disorder did not differ significantly from the individuals in the control group or the autistic individuals in terms of number of complications. A CART analysis yielded a prediction model that examined if a subject's diagnosis could be predicted using solely his/her perinatal data. The model was only able to accurately predict a subject's diagnosis 60% of the time. Although the model predicted better than chance (e.g., 33%), the results did not provide strong support for the sole use of perinatal factors for predicting a later diagnosis of autistic disorder or Asperger's disorder.